



## THE 1929 TATAVLA FIRE AND THE “SALVATION” OF TATAVLA

1929 Tatavla Yangını ve Tatavla'nın Kurtuluş'u

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### ABSTRACT

On 21 January 1929, a large fire broke out in Tatavla, where the Greek population in Istanbul constituted the majority, and more than 200 houses were destroyed. Later on, this fire was on the agenda of Turkish and Greek public opinion. Upon these developments, the name of Tatavla was changed to “Kurtuluş” by the Turkish side. There are almost no publications on this fire in the literature. For this reason, this fire and the work written by Aytek Soner Alpan on Tatavla were criticised.

**Keywords:** Tatavla, Kurtuluş, fire, Greek people, Turkey.

### ÖZ

İstanbul'da Rum nüfusunun büyük bir çoğunluğunu oluşturduğu Tatavla'da 21 Ocak 1929 tarihinde büyük bir yangın çıkmış ve 200'den fazla ev kullanılamaz hale gelmiştir. Daha sonra bu yangın Türk ve Yunan kamuoyunda gündeme gelmiştir. Yaşanan gelişmeler üzerine Türk tarafınca Tatavla'nın ismi “Kurtuluş”a çevrilmiştir. Literatürde bu yangın üzerine neredeyse yayın bulunmamaktadır. Bu nedenle bu yangın ve Tatavla üzerine Aytek Soner Alpan'ın kaleme aldığı eser kritik edilmiştir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Tatavla, Kurtuluş, yangın, Rum halkı, Türkiye.

Alpan, Aytek Soner (2024). *1929 Tatavla Yangını ve Tatavla'nın Kurtuluş'u*. İstos Yayınları, 186 p.

The study produced by Alpan is a book consisting of two separate studies. The first part of the study deals with the issue of Tatavla, known as the Greek Neighborhood in Istanbul, being named “Kurtuluş” after a fire in 1929 and the Turkification of the place. The aim of the first part of the book is to present the idea that the 1929 fire was used as an opportunity by the Turks and was a turning point in the Turkification of Tatavla. In the second part of the book, the story “Tatavla Dilberi Sokrati”, which was published in the

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*İkdam* newspaper between 9–15 May 1929 (after the Tatabla fire) in Turkey, is discussed. The author’s aim in this part is to reveal that this serial, which is “unsuccessful in literary terms” (2024: 147) but “a carefully constructed text”, was used as a tool in the ostracization of the Greek community in the eyes of Turkish society. According to the author, in this serial, “Tatabla was sexualized while being ethnically othered, and ethnicized while being sexually othered” (2024: 148).

In the first section of the study, a systematic and chronological evaluation of the news reports published on the day of the fire and in the following days was conducted, making use of Turkish and Greek newspapers as listed in the bibliography. Another issue highlighted by the author is that most Greek newspapers printed in Istanbul, such as *Aneksartitos* [Independent], *Metarritmis* [Reform], *Fos*, *Hronika*, and *Tarinas*, had ceased publication. Despite the inaccessibility of these newspapers, the author utilised available Turkish and Greek newspapers, as well as insights from Turkish and Greek researchers knowledgeable about the subject. However, a notable shortcoming of the author’s approach is that he constructs the process of nationalism as an ideological formation through a one-sided reading, without engaging in a comparative analysis based on the concept of the “other” (Greece). Despite this limitation, a dominant strength of the study is that the author frequently attempts to summarise his study through poetic inferences. The most striking point about the first part is that even the name of the place that was tried to be created/formed within the nationalist frame study could not be tolerated (Tatabla: It became Tatabla by adding the neutral plural article (ta) in front of the word *tayla*, which means horse stable) and a conscious choice was made with the name “Kurtuluş”, thinking of it as a victory or “conquest” against the Greeks. In this way, a conscious transition from Tatabla to “Salvation” was realized with a xenophobic perspective.

When the study is examined, it is seen that the act of consciously realizing “Liberation” with a xenophobic perspective in the first part has an important meaning “in name”. In the study, there is a claim that the place was Turkified through Tatabla. However, the conquest of Istanbul by the Turks took place in 1453. From this date on, Tatabla existed as a historical Greek Neighbourhood in this province under Turkish rule. The settlement of Turks in this neighbourhood started in 1955. The opening of the first mosque in this neighbourhood took place in 1962. When the structure of Tatabla is examined, it is seen that it is not a region that hosts the upper classes in terms

of class. It is mentioned about an “uncanny” place that is Greek but not, for example, Pera, that hosts the lower classes, not the upper classes, aristocrats or bourgeois elements of the community, and is famous for its carnival where various boundaries are crossed or ignored. Therefore, the need to look at the issue from this perspective is understood from the story given in the second part of the book.

The second part of the work is an evaluation of the role of ethnosexuality in shaping nationalism in relation to the publication of the serial “Tatavla Dilberi Sokrati” in the newspaper *İkdam*. The subject under consideration is that the heteronormative masculine/patriarchal mechanism that is being attempted to be established opens the door to the reader as a complementary role in the formation of the nation. In fact, the serial presents us with a field constructed on the Jacobean top-down attitude of nationalism, which does not consider sub-ethnic and sub-masculine structures as its own. Nationalism, which appears as a multi-layered/ dimensional structure, has been addressed by the author in this field within the framework of moral/moral dimensions that may be more invisible and less criterion, rather than criteria such as language, religion and ethnicity, through the Tatavla Fire. This reading is carried out because ethnic can be sexual and sexual can be ethnic, and it has been shown that the nationalist policy was built with “us” from the Tatavla fire; and that insurmountable walls can be built against the “other”. This serial, which takes the construction of ethnosexual borders through Tatavla within moral criteria, has been schematized as the role or roles constructed/shaped/assigned to the women and men of Tatavla defining a society and ethnicity. An attempt has been made to create a “beyond the city”, “par excellence” with “queer dystopia”. In *İkdam*, a newspaper of the period that can be described as nationalist-conservative, it is an important criterion for “history science” that a state policy cannot be produced from a serial whose author is unknown. However, the newspaper also provided good evidence of the existence of efforts to marginalize the “other” of the ethnosexual approach in terms of reading and understanding the period’s conjuncture.

In two separate sections, the author, who addresses the marginalization of a place and an ethnic group through a fire and a literary text, has added a conclusion/evaluation section for both sections. It is seen that the author gives impartial information and data until the conclusion sections. However, it is seen that the author has displayed a biased attitude by leaving impartiality aside in the conclusion sections of both sections. In the first

section, the author states that the place was Turkified, that attempts were made to Turkify it, that the Greek community was marginalized, and that Tatavla was turned into “Sodom and Gomorrah” while this was being done. However, no source that could be considered a state policy regarding this claim was found in the work. In the second section, he only emphasizes that the Greeks were degraded as immoral, “queer Tatavla: Women are not women, men are not men” (2024: 86) through the *İkdam* newspaper and presents this as a general attitude within ethnonationalism. This attitude is also wrong because, as stated above, the newspaper is on a Turkist-Islamist spectrum. *İkdam* newspaper has had writers of very different views, such as Ali Kemal and Yakup Kadri, and that has addressed its readers with different perspectives. For this reason, the serial in question does not have the quality of a serial that goes beyond a perception that has been tried to be created with a fiction.

The most admirable aspect of the author in this work is his effort to create an argument along the lines of “Contraria contraiis curantur”, meaning “opposites are good for opposites”. In this respect, it can be said that the plot is correct, but the method has been determined incorrectly. Because no case in history can be examined independently of the conjuncture and the conditions of the period. A case that is being discussed should be revealed within the discipline of history and within the cause-effect relationship. It is understood that the author is not a “historian” and that he specialized in different disciplines during her undergraduate and graduate education.

The Tatavla fire and its aftermath occurred at a tense time between the Turkish and Greek governments when the issue of stages was on the agenda, during a negative winter period that Istanbul had not seen for a long time, and in the face of a situation where adequate intervention was not made. It is understood that the Greek press’s blaming attitude towards the Turks in an isolated fire that broke out in Tatavla, known as the Greek neighbourhood of a city that was liberated 7 years ago, the Patriarchate’s assistance and the claims that the British Ambassador visited the fire area pushed the Turkish side to a defensive stance and aimed to prevent an internal issue from turning into an international issue. Considering this situation, the answer to the question of where the “Salvation” of “Tatavla” lies should be as follows: The facts of the fire and its aftermath should be presented in all their nakedness, and in a period when nation-building is dominant all over the world, the culture of living together and solidarity between

the Turkish and Greek nations should be revealed, and the “peace doves” among governments and societies should be increased.

### **References**

Alpan, Aytek Soner (2024). *1929 Tatavla Yangını ve Tatavla'nın Kurtuluş'u*. İstos Yayınları.

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